



News Release

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State asks teens to hold the phone while walking

Pedestrian injuries on the rise amongst teens due to inattention

OLYMPIA — Inattention can be just as dangerous for pedestrians as it is for drivers. And as more teens tune into music, text, and check the Internet while on the go, they're tuning out potential hazards — prompting the state Department of Health to ask kids to tune out those devices.

Nationally, pedestrian injuries among 16 to 19-year-olds have increased 25 percent in the past five years according to [Safe Kids](#), which works to prevent accidental injuries to children. That late-teen group accounts for half of all pedestrian deaths among youths 19 and younger. A new Safe Kids study of more than 34,000 middle and high school students showed that of those who were distracted, about 40 percent were texting, about 40 percent were wearing headphones, and 20 percent were talking on phones.

From 2006 to 2010, the most recent period for which figures are available, Washington had 43 teen pedestrian deaths, ranking number 18 among the 37 states with more than 10 such deaths. It's close to the national per capita average.

"Those texts and calls can wait, and kids can listen to music at other times," said State Health Officer Dr. Maxine Hayes, a pediatrician. "It's more important to walk safely. And if you're driving, of course, keep your eyes on the road and your hands on the wheel."

With daylight saving time nearing an end for the year, it's darker outside when many teens go to or from school. That makes it even more important to pay close attention while walking.

Safe Kids Washington suggests that parents talk to kids, especially teens, about the danger of distracted walking. Start the discussion early about safe use of technology — and keep talking

about it. Parents can set a good example by showing what crossing the street safely looks like, and by avoiding texting while driving and other distractions.

Teens should put devices down and turn headphones off; look, listen, and make eye contact with drivers before crossing a street. They should also be on the lookout for cars that are turning or backing up. Driveways and parking lots can be especially dangerous.

Other safety tips for teens while walking:

- Use sidewalks or paths, and cross at street corners with traffic signals and crosswalks when possible.
- Be aware of others who may be distracted — and speak up when you see someone who is distracted.

Some Washington kids already get the message. The [Rams in Action Club](#) at Lacey's North Thurston High School won the Safe Kids Worldwide Pedestrian Safety high school contest for its members' work to educate peers.

The [Department of Health website](#) (doh.wa.gov) is your source for *a healthy dose of information*. Also, [find us on Facebook](#) and [follow us on Twitter](#).

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